

Macalester International

Volume 1 *The International Community and the
Emerging World (Dis)Order*

Article 21

Spring 1995

Response to Sakamoto

Gretel S. Figueroa
Macalester College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl>

Recommended Citation

Figueroa, Gretel S. (1995) "Response to Sakamoto," *Macalester International*: Vol. 1, Article 21.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl/vol1/iss1/21>

This Response is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute for Global Citizenship at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Macalester International by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact scholarpub@macalester.edu.

Response

Gretel S. Figueroa

I. Introduction

Professor Sakamoto has presented us a paper with a large vision and many interesting and specific ideas. I will respond by commenting on those points I found most arresting.

II. A Critique

A. Unipolar World Military Order

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States has risen to the top of the global military ladder. Professor Sakamoto points out that this military advantage is still not universal or strong enough to establish peace and order in the post–Cold War world. Why? According to Sakamoto, military power alone cannot control the forces created by the three other world developments: the universality of the capitalist world market, the universalization of nationalism, and the globalization of democracy.

I agree, but I would also add that it is not only the power of these “new” developments that seem to check the United States’ military omnipotence. I feel that one of the leading forces limiting the power of the U.S. military position is this nation’s foreign policy driven by “self-interest.” Like other nations, our country often finds itself in heated national debates at each international crisis. In this particular debate, the demand of American citizens (through their congressmen and senators) is heard rather clearly. They ask that its military force and economic resources not be deployed in the “internal affairs” of other nations *unless* their interests (economic and, thus, political) are threatened. It is in this way that the United States only grudgingly chooses to exercise its global military advantage in economically poor countries like Bosnia, Serbia, Liberia, and Rwanda while reacting almost instantaneously in countries like Kuwait. Poor countries used to interest the United States when

the threat of communism was “real” and its citizens could readily identify with this political threat. In the post – Cold War world, however, the internal conditions of poor countries are of very little interest to the U.S. The potential economic gains that would accompany the establishment of order via military intervention often pale in comparison to the potential human and economic loss that could come with this intervention. Moreover, it can be argued that the United States is pushed to take a military stance in poorer nations only when human rights atrocities have reached such a public and visible level that inaction would hurt “U.S. credibility.”

I want to be clear that I am in no way calling for increased U.S. military intervention in developing nations. I am, however, questioning the selection criteria that seem to drive this nation’s foreign policy, which, in my view, should move beyond simple “self-interest” and toward interest in the dignity of the human race. The unipolarization of military power is not a hopeful manifestation of the deeper process of “internationalism” or an “eroding nation-state system,” as Professor Sakamoto implies. Although it is true that the United States could never establish a global order on the basis of its military prowess alone, it could use its unmatched military power to take a larger role in establishing order and peace in the world. The greatest barrier to this is its unwillingness to do so when it is not in its best economic interest.

B. Single Capitalist Global Market

Professor Sakamoto argues that, along with the aforementioned unipolarization of military power, the rise of the single capitalist global market is a reflection of the trend toward “internationalization,” which “cuts across national boundaries, transcending and eroding the nation-state system.” Yet, is the nation-state system eroding in the advent of this single capitalist market?

On September 12, 1994, the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* reprinted an article written by Thomas L. Friedman for the *New York Times* titled “World Peace through Economics.” Needless to say, I was intrigued by the title of Friedman’s article, and I believe it can help make the link between the state of “nation-

states" and the globalization of a single capitalist market that Professor Sakamoto does not clearly make in this section.

Friedman points to the unexpected outbreak of peace in the Middle East, South Africa, and Northern Ireland and asks if Adam Smith's beneficial "invisible hand" of free markets could be linked to positive changes in recent history. "The short answer," writes Friedman, "is that there is something to this argument. Changes in the global economy have helped crack all three of these conflicts," as seemingly irreconcilable ethnic and cultural differences have yielded to the mutual benefits that could be obtained by a peaceful nation participating in the larger global market. One indication of this trend for Friedman is that "the value of a peace accord used to be measured by the number of lives saved; now, it is also measured by the number of jobs created." However, he also warns us to "forget all that 'end of history stuff' because in some unanticipated ways the marketplace may be sharpening ethnic tensions as well." He notes that the more people are asked to integrate with distant, impersonal economic structures, the more they want to assert their own particular local or national identity. Or, as he puts it, "the more the world beckons from one side, the louder the call of the tribe, the family, the neighborhood from the other." The trick, in Friedman's eyes, is to find a balance between the need for personal identity and the lure of the capitalist global market.

Yet, I think Friedman's analysis also demonstrates that whether a people choose to fight for personal/ethnic identity or a more pluralistic nation-state, the global market moves and grows as nation-states peddle their goods and protect (at the very least) their own economic self-interest or advantage.

A clear example of this symbiosis of the nation-state and the market can be seen with the resurgence of neomercantilism in the Clinton Administration. Here, we see a renewed focus on government policies that work to insure national dominance in specific global markets. This, coupled with the belief that we are seeing the emergence of the first single capitalist market in history, can lead one to conclude that the nation-state of the future will have to begin to assume the responsibility of protecting its people's unique cultural identity if the "balance" Friedman speaks of is to be found. Thus, the nation-state, I argue, does not seem destined to fade because of the emergence of the single

capitalist market, for markets need a level of political stability that can be provided only by nation-states.

C. The Universalization of Nationalism

Professor Sakamoto carefully traces how nationalism, which originated in the West, spread with the massive tricontinental decolonization and national liberation movements after WWII and then moved to the former Soviet Union and Eastern bloc. Unfortunately, I fail to see how this movement can be a manifestation of the “trend toward international equality or equality of nations,” as he later asserts. I see an inherent contradiction between nationalism — which implies separation and division from other nations of the world — and an international equality or equality of nations that brings forth an entirely opposite vision of the world. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the constant problems the UN finds when attempting to enforce a resolution needing multinational support. Here is an international body that is constantly paralyzed by the growing nationalism of its members. Should not this trend toward “international equality or equality of nations” be seen in this of all institutions?

D. The Globalization of Democracy

The fourth and final trend Professor Sakamoto notes is the universalization of democracy, which he argues is “the manifestation of the struggle for and the establishment of the equality of universal human rights.” I find this statement unclear. I interpret “democracy” as government by the people either directly or through representatives. By this definition, what people ask their governmental representatives to do or do themselves does not guarantee a final outcome such as “equality of human rights.” However, if by this statement Professor Sakamoto is arguing that the growing number of democracies is a manifestation of the revolutions by people who saw the right to participate in government as part of their human rights, I cannot refute this explanation.

Yet, I would caution his optimistic outlook for the future of democracy. For although “antidemocracy cannot claim legiti-

macy" in most people's eyes, this is hardly a guarantee that the spread of democracy will become universal. If we agree that democracy is a government of the people, many populist regimes have come to power with their people's support but refuse to practice democratic principles. Civil wars that tear a nation apart often push many toward appealing to "undemocratic" leaders.

Even more disconcerting, not all democratic elections guarantee the preservation of democracy. One example of this is the recent elections in Algeria in which an "Islamic fundamentalist" government was "democratically elected" while openly campaigning that, if elected, they would establish a new state that would no longer hold elections. If the world is moving toward a democracy of nations, as Professor Sakamoto argues, how can one accommodate the possibility that a nation may choose not to be a democracy?

II. Dialectics of Modern History

In the second part of Professor Sakamoto's paper, he explains what he sees as the fundamental contradictions underlying the historical change in modern times. These contradictions are (a) capitalism vs. socialism, (b) state nationalism vs. internationalism, and (c) democracy vs. authoritarianism.

Although it must be said that finding the engines of modern historical change is quite a noble and useful endeavor, it is very difficult to complete. I do not mean to be overly critical; however, I do see some problems with this analysis. For instance, what Professor Sakamoto defines as "modern history" is, at the very least, debatable, as are his "engines." "By modern history, we refer to the period since the latter half of the eighteenth century," he states; however, the terminology he uses to describe these engines of change are concepts formed in the postindustrial era, e.g., capitalism, socialism, state nationalism, democracy, and authoritarianism. Are we to assume that history began with the coming of the Machine Age? Does historical change result only from the conflicts and contradictions that arise in industrialized nations?

Professor Sakamoto uses dependency theory and, at times, Marxian theory to take a stance on how the "early-starter"

nations in the North gave rise to “world conflict” via their colonial and imperialist eras. These eras established an economic dependency for the South and brought forth an ideological conflict in terms of human rights. Professor Sakamoto justifies taking a dependency and Marxian theoretical stance because, unlike realism, these permit him a more dynamic view of history. I agree that this view is dynamic, but is it complete?

In later remarks, Professor Sakamoto traces the “engines of historical change” beginning with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which gave birth to what he defines as the “core bloc” nations of Britain, France, and the United States. In his eyes, this core bloc, armed with democracy, has assumed “the role of the engine of world political and economic development” and, still further, the role of “setting the rule of development (and underdevelopment) for the rest of the world.”

I will not debate his reading of “modern history.” It would be ludicrous to argue that developing nations have ever been allowed to change or modify the course of modern world history in any direct way. Nevertheless, I do want to question how Sakamoto can sum up the experience of two-thirds of the world’s population by characterizing it as merely the “late-starters” who, therefore, develop these historical anomalies: capitalist, nationalist, and authoritarian models (C–N–A) or the socialist, nationalist, and authoritarian models (S–N–A). I would suggest that these systems of government grew out of much more profound reasons than merely the point of history at which they began.

On a more personal note, I feel that a case should also be made for the importance of culture in shaping history. The diversity of cultures and the conflicts that often arise from it are an important “engine of historical change.” In many ways, history will never be over unless we are all somehow sucked into a uniform culture.

How can I be so sure that a uniform culture will never develop, even under the power of democracy and capitalism? I would argue that this is attributable to what Francis Fukuyama called man’s “thymos,” or spirit. Fukuyama argues that man’s thymos is satisfied only by attaining recognition in society. Furthermore, this need for recognition (or, the need to satisfy one’s thymos) is what motivates people.

Perhaps Fukuyama will not agree with the following, but one learns very quickly in anthropology that every culture defines differently what is needed to gain social recognition. What that group decides will bring recognition is generally what that group will use to define their view of the world and, often, to order their society. If no culture has exactly the same view of what it takes to be recognized, then it follows that it will always develop unique social organizations and norms. Even when cultures come together and invariably influence one another's social structures and values, seldom is the end result two identical cultures. For proof of this, look how the melting pot theory in this country has proven itself a myth. Each ethnic group has changed with its arrival, but we have yet to fully assimilate into one perfectly fused American society. The conflict that often comes with this diversity continues to be a very important issue that can still be seen as an "engine of historical change" of the United States; the same can be said on a global level.

III. Unending Historical Conditions

Here, Professor Sakamoto returns to the power of capitalism and democracy as engines of historical change. He proposes that history cannot be over, as Fukuyama claimed, for there is an inherent contradiction between capitalism and democracy.

I cannot be in complete accord with the notion that, by necessity, capitalism creates uneven, unequal, and inequitable development. Human greed does just fine with or without such a system. Corruption, greed, and inequality still appear in socialist systems based on egalitarianism, which leads me to believe that formal systems have less to do with equality than does the human will.

Also, many would argue that democracy is radically different from egalitarianism. Democracy can be seen as an ideal form of government that permits a civil struggle for human rights. However, in my mind, this connotes that people will be given the right to ask and fight for what they conceive to be their human rights. It is impossible to predict whether an acceptable (or even equitable) solution for all will result from this process. The only guaranteed outcome a democracy provides is that one may find a solution that the majority can live with.

IV. Pivotal Global Problematics

Once Professor Sakamoto has established that history will always have new challenges to face, he moves on to state that world history is entering a new phase in which the C-N-D model ("the core of modernity") has made its internal contradictions the new global problematics that will shape world history. He identifies four that he deems critical.

A. Peace/Disparity Problematique

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the ascension of the United States to the forefront of the new military order, he sees two major areas of concern that this hierarchical system faces — nuclear disarmament and the growing "ethno-cultural" security issues.

The former, he feels, has declined in importance since the fall of the Soviet Union. The only lasting problem is that until nuclear disarmament is achieved, developing nations will be tempted to prioritize nuclear weapons in their early stages of development. These types of "security" measures are fiscal mismanagement on the part of these developing nations who are calling for an "egalitarian military order." This egalitarian world order, in Professor Sakamoto's eyes, can be found either by equally arming the world or by equally disarming it.

This makes sense to me; however, when has a military force ever been created from or established by the desire for equality? The mere existence of a military force is, in the most benevolent light, an expression of a nation's desire for self-defense. Even viewed from this perspective, the motivation, it seems to me, is to gain military advantage to fend off an aggressor. This is a recipe for armed competition.

His second area of concern is the ethno-conflicts that have grown in number and significance since the end of the ideological Cold War. In Professor Sakamoto's view, these moves toward cultural/civilizational determinism are a cover for other interests, including the socioeconomic.

Since I have already stated my view of culture as an engine of historical change, I would merely concur with Thomas Friedman's view that ethno-conflicts are more than a rationalization;

they are a manifestation of attempts to balance the lure of the capitalist world market and a very real need for a recognition of a personal, human, and cultural identity. Economic well-being can both heighten and lessen ethnic or cultural tensions, leading me to believe that although they are often linked together, each is a legitimate motivator in its own right.

B. Development/Democracy Problematique

I agree with Professor Sakamoto's observation that since the end of the Cold War, the strategic importance of many developing nations has been lost. Once determined useless pawns in an ideological war, the developed nations established economic promise as a new measure of priority for aid. However, I am not convinced that this dilemma cannot be solved on the basis of the logic of capitalism. It seems economically irrational for developed nations to keep two-thirds of the world's people in abject poverty. If the world market is to reach its greatest height, breadth, and level of prosperity, it cannot do so by leaving two-thirds of the world population disenfranchised. Democratic economic development can work if, in fact, the hegemons can be convinced that it could work for all.

C. Environment/Democracy Problematique

Here I see the problem of definition arise in Professor Sakamoto's argument: democracy=equality=an egalitarian distribution of resources. This comes into conflict with his second definition: capitalism=uneven development. He seems to argue that the only way capitalism could ever lead to an egalitarian society or satisfy the Benthamite principle of the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" is if our natural environment were inexhaustible. Again, capitalism is a system of allocation of *scarce* resources; that does not inherently imply or create inequality, nor does it imply that one has a "perceived infinity of the environment." This is something human beings have chosen to assume when justifying the manipulation of this capitalist market system to their advantage.

Professor Sakamoto finally points to the crux of the definitional matter when what he is calling for is an expansion of the

concept of democracy to include factors that concern the quality of democratic life, such as ecological harmony. I agree. However, I disagree with him and Marx that “spiritual deepening” of the kind they both suggest is tantamount to the end of capitalism or that democracy and the quality of democratic life conflict with a capitalist system. In my opinion, this “spiritual deepening” will come from a more basic human instinct: the need to face and conquer challenges in order to survive and, furthermore, enjoy life. Markets are used by humans in an effort to maximize their “happiness.” Individuals can ignore the unhappiness of others for only so long, but there will come a point where the definition of happiness will include the quality of democratic life of all humans who find themselves sharing the finite resources of a single planet and where the “logic of the global market” will move to satisfy this global need as well.

V. Conclusion

Professor Sakamoto’s concluding ideas sound both wonderful and problematic. For instance, I see a few problems with the very institution of the UN. If nation-states are weakened by the arduousness of reaching a national consensus, what will be the cost of reaching a *global* consensus? How can the void formed by the erosion of the nation-state be filled or compensated for by a more “problematic” international organization? Nation-states (especially hegemons) are critical to the formation of international or regional organizations; take away the nation-state and the larger organization crumbles. The collapse of the League of Nations is an example of this phenomenon. Are states truly ceding their lost authority to international organizations? If so, can this larger structure keep peace and order in a way that better satisfies the needs of individual world citizens? Or, will its authority be so far removed that it will be even less effective than the state was?

Finally, funding will always be a crucial issue. Despite the mission to help humanity, reformed UN institutions and other bodies will always have to bow to the interests of the big donors. Moreover, if UN decision-making is not modified, *when* and *where* these transnational structures get used will always be subject to the whims of the strongest nations.

If the UN cannot change, then, let us look to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). My current hope lies with them since they have managed to free themselves from the dangers of nationalism if not the dangers of bureaucracy. Human nature will ultimately decide if these structures can truly remain transnational and gain the strength to tackle the larger global problematiques.

Perhaps Professor Sakamoto is right in identifying people as the only hope for the North and the developing South. Unfortunately, I have very little faith in the common citizen of the North who is content to watch the world via CNN, which caters to human "fascination of the abomination" and seldom motivates people into action. The South needs to overcome its social divisions and break the cycle of assumed corruption and theft and to make a concerted effort to maximize its resources. By maximizing its talents and resources, the South can begin to manipulate the world market in such a way that it will allow all its citizens to live in dignity.

My experiences in Guatemala and Madagascar have made this point all the more clear. Although the roots of these nations' social dilemmas are found in their colonial past, the solutions must come from those living there today. Northern NGOs can be and are useful in this effort, but the people of the South must begin to—and be allowed to—reassert their agency.